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WILLIAM PRYOR LETCHWORTH

By J. N. LARNED

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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

THE LIFE AND WORK OF
WILLIAM PRYOR LETCHWORTH

READ AT A MEETING OF THE BUFFALO HISTORICAL SOCIETY ON THURSDAY EVENING, APRIL 18, 1912

By J. N. LARNED

I knew Mr. Letchworth with considerable intimacy for somewhat more than fifty years. I thought that I knew him well, and had admired and esteemed him justly, to the high measure of his dues. But, last year, it became my privilege to prepare an account of his life, and in my study for that purpose, of his whole career and of himself as revealed in it, I found that I had not more than half understood how rare a man he was in qualities and powers. What I shall say to you about him tonight will be quoted for the most part from the biography (soon to be published) in which I have attempted to portray his life, his work, his manifested character, the greatness of his service to the world, in an adequate way.

The life to be reviewed was that of a man who spent a moderate part of it in pursuits of personal business, until they had given him the freedom and the means for effective service to his fellow men, rendered through a long remainder of laborious years, and who exercised in that service a rare capacity for what may be described as the states-

manship of philanthropy, which labors for the reformation of evil conditions in the world. The instructiveness of his labors and the inspiration of his example seem equally to have given an importance to his life which death did not end.

In devoting the greater part of his mature life to benevolent work (performed as an unpaid official of the State of New York, and wholly at his own cost), Mr. Letchworth was obedient, it is plain, to hereditary promptings, from an ancestry which had been spiritually cultured for two centuries by the humane Christianity of the Society of Friends. The family was of ancient English stock,—so ancient that its origin, if the tracing were possible, would most likely be found in Saxon times. The name, Letchworth, is that of a parish and village in the hundred of Broadwater, county of Hertford, England, two miles from the town of Hitchin and northwestward from London about thirty-three miles. It seems obviously a Saxon name, and whether the parish received it from the family or the family from the parish is an undetermined question which calls for no discussion here.

Our present interest in this genealogy goes back to about the middle of the Seventeenth Century, soon after George Fox began the preaching in England which inspired the formation of the Society of Friends. At that time one Robert Letchworth, living in the village of Chesterton, near Cambridge, and about twenty-five miles from Letchworth village, is found to have joined the religious followers of George Fox, and to have borne his share of the penalties of imprisonment and fine which the Friends or Quakers of that generation had to suffer, for refusing to pay tithes to the established church, or to attend its services, or to make oath in courts of law. This Robert Letchworth is believed to have been the grandfather of another Robert, born late

in the Seventeenth Century, from whom the descent of all who bear the name in America is authentically traced.

The last-named Robert Letchworth, a business man of London, served also in the ministry of the Friends for many years, and his third son, Thomas, became a very notable preacher of the sect. From this Thomas Letchworth the families who bear the name in England derive their descent.

On our western continent the family name was planted by John Letchworth, the second son of Robert, who emigrated to America in 1766. Leaving his wife and four children in England, he came alone, to test the conditions of life at Philadelphia before venturing to bring his family thither. In 1768 he had established himself in business as a builder so satisfactorily that wife and children were called to join him in the new home. The reunion was unhappily brief; for the father, being summoned back to England on some errand of business, in 1772, fell sick while there and died. His widow, thus sorely bereft, remained at Philadelphia and reared her children, two sons and two daughters, under circumstances of much hardship, in the troubled years before and during the Revolutionary War. The younger son of this transplanted family, William Letchworth, married and spent his life in Philadelphia, rearing a family of eight children, the eldest of whom, named Josiah, born in 1791, became the father of the subject of this biography.

Josiah Letchworth, married in 1815 to Miss Ann Hance, began his wedded life at Burlington, New Jersey, but removed in time to successive homes at Brownville, Moravia, Sherwood and, finally, Auburn, New York. His residence in Auburn was no longer than five years; but it sufficed to make him a citizen of note. He had not come to the city

as a stranger, his life for twenty years at Sherwood having brought him into much intercourse with the city; but nothing in that intercourse could account for the quickness with which he became affectionately known and esteemed by the public at large. He entered actively into social service work, along many lines; interested himself greatly in the schools; spoke much and earnestly for temperance and against slavery, and appears to have caused the fine spirit of benevolence and justice in true Quakerism to be felt in the city as a potent force. When he died, in the spring of 1857, there was a profound sense of public loss in Auburn, which Senator Seward gave voice to some months later, on returning from Washington to his home. "Josiah Letchworth, the founder of our charities, the defender of truth and justice, is no more," he exclaimed, in a public address. "You," he added, "deplore his loss as I do; for he was not more my friend than a public benefactor."

A more significant tribute to the memory of Josiah Letchworth was paid by children of the schools, who raised a fund with which to procure the engraving of his portrait on steel by Mr. Buttre, a noted artist of the day. Prints from this excellent engraving went into many Auburn homes.

It goes without saying that the father who won the hearts of a community was loved and revered in his own household; and this was equally true of the mother,—a strong and admirable character, who ruled her children with a firmness that was ever kind and wise. Between the brothers and sisters, too, the ties of affection were more than common in strength and warmth. From an abundance of family correspondence, confided to the writer of this memoir, he receives no other impression so clear as that of the atmosphere of love, of piety in the large sense, of all

simple rightness of feeling, in which the young were reared, and the influence of which they carried with them from the parental home.

Of a family of four daughters and four sons William Pryor Letchworth was the fourth child and the second son. He was born on the 26th of May, 1823, while the family lived at Brownville. Very little of autobiographical material is to be found in anything left by Mr. Letchworth, of letters or other writings; but in bits of reminiscence that he did now and then commit to paper he was always carried back to his childhood. One such tells of a project he formed, apparently in his twelfth or thirteenth year, of running away from home.

"By reading the lives of some noted men, and various stories of marvellous adventure [he wrote], I was impressed with the idea that, to be successful and achieve great things, it was necessary that one should run away from home while a boy. This conclusion, and the secret resolution I had formed to act on it, I confided to an employe of my father of whom I was very fond. He basely betrayed me, and my father soon found the opportunity for a private conversation with me. To my dismay, he said: 'William, it is understood that thee intends to leave us. I am sorry to learn this, as we all think a great deal of thee. Through thy early childhood and down to the present time thee has been a great care to mother and myself, to say nothing of considerable expense, and we had been looking forward to the time when thee would have the good will and strength to make us some return for what we have tried to do for thee. But, since thee has decided to leave us, we will conform ourselves to thy wishes. In the carrying-out of thy plan there is one thing, however, that troubles me, and that is thy leaving in the night, and without the opportunity of our bidding thee good-bye. Mother has a pair of new stockings she has knit for thee, and thy brothers and sisters would like to make thee some little presents.' This brought me to my senses. I felt shame and disgust with myself, and nothing more was said of the running-away plot."

Nothing could be told of the father of William Pryor Letchworth that would illustrate more significantly the wisdom with which the youth of the latter was trained, and the fine inheritance of mind and temper on which it was his good fortune to draw.

Another of the few gleanings of autobiographical material from Mr. Letchworth's papers is a note of the circumstances of his going from the family home into the outside world, to begin the career of business which he followed from his fifteenth to his fiftieth year. Not long after the frustration of his running-away project, his father, he relates,

"made application to the head of an importing and manufacturing house [at Auburn] for a place for me. He soon received a reply, asking him to bring me to the city. A conversation followed between the head of the firm and my father, at the close of which my father said: 'Well, William' (addressing the merchant by his given name), 'I have endeavored thus far to make a man of my son, and will ask thee to finish the task.' Before leaving, my father gave me a dollar, with the remark that I might need a little pocket-money. This was all that my father ever gave me, and with this I began life. A few years after I had become of age I was disposed to envy one of my former chums whose father gave him five thousand dollars to start business with; but his experience made me finally thankful that my father never was able to give me anything beyond the one dollar.

"My salary with the firm [Hayden & Holmes, manufacturers and dealers in saddlery hardware] which engaged me was fixed at forty dollars a year, and living, and out of this I was to clothe myself and meet all my personal expenses. I set out with the determination that this sum, small as it was, should suffice for all my requirements. The result was that I saved during the year between two and three dollars, and placed the same on interest. . . . The realization that I could practice sufficient self-denial to live within my means gave me greater confidence in myself and strengthened my character. Living within one's means is

as necessary to success as it is essential to one's peace of mind and happiness."

Thus William had his graduation from home and common schools, in or about his fifteenth year, and was matriculated in the university of practical affairs, to learn the ways of men and be trained for entrance into the activities of the world. Ambition had an early growth in him, as he more than once confessed. Apparently it was an ambition quite undefined in those early years. Nothing indicates that his aspirations were directed toward any particular goal, of political or literary or scientific renown, or of wealth. What he felt as ambition may have been just an upward-impelling eager spirit which would have the same potency in all situations, to make the most of them, get the best out of them, rise to the highest of their offered possibilities. All that is told of his youthful clerkship in the service of Hayden & Holmes goes to show that this spirit was as manifest in it as in the higher, final work of his life. He studied the making, buying, and selling of saddlery hardware as carefully, thoroughly, zealously as, forty years later, he studied the saving of homeless children, the care of epileptics, and the treatment of the insane. As a boy he accepted the assignment to him of a field of work in which his means of living were to be earned, and labored in it without stint; as a man, when his independence had been won, he chose for himself a mission of social service, and gave himself unsparingly to that. The fidelity to his undertaking was the same in each case.

In the service of Hayden & Holmes, at their establishment in Auburn, the youth grew to young manhood, remaining six or seven years, living in the family of Mr. Holmes, as a friend, and becoming more and more invaluable to the firm. Their business was an extensive one for

that period, employing a large part of the convicts in the prison workshops at Auburn, under contract with the State. Mr. Hayden, the senior partner in the firm, was the head of several other establishments in the same line of business, at different points in the country, including one at New York. That gentleman had kept an eye on young Letchworth, noting his intelligence, his fidelity, the complete understanding he had acquired of every detail of the business, and the good judgment with which his duties were performed, with the result that the Auburn clerk was called to a post of more importance at New York.

This advance to a higher school of business and to the opening of a larger experience of life came to Mr. Letchworth in the summer or fall of 1845,—the year after his crossing the threshold into manhood's estate. Of the three years of his life and work in New York not much can be told. He wrote frequently to his parents and sisters, and his letters were carefully kept, as all similar family records were preserved; but they contain almost nothing that touches the work he was doing or the circumstances of his life outside of his work.

His residence in New York ended in the autumn of 1848, when he entered into new arrangements of business which carried him to Buffalo, and into a partnership with the Messrs. Pratt & Co., leading hardware merchants of that city. They had known him at Auburn and at New York, through their dealings with Hayden & Holmes, and evidently they had formed a high opinion of his worth. Accordingly, having planned to increase the importance of the saddlery hardware department of their business, they made overtures to Mr. Letchworth which became definite in October, 1848, and which resulted quickly in the organization of a new firm, under the name of Pratt & Letchworth,

distinct in business from that of Pratt & Co., but in which Mr. Letchworth was associated with the three members of the latter firm, namely, Samuel F. Pratt, Pascal P. Pratt, and Edward P. Beals. In a "Sketch of the Life of Samuel F. Pratt," written and privately printed by Mr. Letchworth after his elder partner's death, he states that the negotiations which brought him into this connection were conducted by Mr. Pascal P. Pratt, with his brother's concurrence, and he adds: "I think few partnerships ever existed with so uniformly pleasant relations. In reviewing the long intercourse between Samuel F. Pratt and myself, I cannot recall, in all the discussions growing out of the perplexities of business, one unkind word or even harsh tone."

Here, then, William Pryor Letchworth, at the age of twenty-five, had come to the opening of a quite perfect opportunity for making, to his own advantage as well as to the advantage of others, a full use of the business knowledge and experience he had been storing carefully for ten years. For some years after he assumed the responsibilities that attended the establishing and upbuilding of such a business as that of Pratt & Letchworth became, the burden on him must have been heavy to bear. Even more than in his 'prentice years with Hayden & Holmes, his life appears to have been immersed in the affairs of the factory and the counting-room. Outside of what relates to these there is little record of what he thought or felt or said or did, for four or five years. Probably it was still the fact, as he wrote in March, 1849, that he had made few acquaintances in Buffalo "save in the way of business." For social relaxations he cannot have had much time. In a letter to his brother George, written on Christmas Day, 1852, there is a cry that seems wrung from him by the consciousness that he is overtasking his strength. He can never have

been robust in physique, and, though no illness or disability is spoken of, he had been brought somewhat sharply, perhaps, to a realization that his health was insecure. "Oh, that I had an iron constitution, as some have," he exclaimed. "Of all things earthly that God could bestow upon me I could pray for nothing more fervently than for strong, rugged, robust health." Evidently, in the following year, he so shaped matters in his business as to relax its demands on him; for he spent some months of the winter and spring of 1854 in Florida, with apparent good effects, and came back then to about two years more of unbroken business cares. In 1856, having been joined in the business by his brother Josiah (his brother Edward having entered it previously) he indulged himself in a year of travel abroad, from which vacation he came back to resume the headship of the firm of Pratt & Letchworth, but under circumstances which undoubtedly eased his labors and cares. In his brothers he now had a staff of the greatest possible helpfulness to him, and throughout the establishment there was an organized efficiency of work. Somewhat later, when the firm bought property at Black Rock for the location of their manufacturing plant, a great development of that side of their business was begun. The manufacture of malleable iron was undertaken soon after, and that became one of the leading industrial enterprises of the city.

Notwithstanding this enlargement of his undertakings there are signs that Mr. Letchworth, after returning from his sojourn abroad, had more leisure to give to interests outside of the making and marketing of goods, and was enjoying a widened intercourse with people in Buffalo on other than business lines. Many of the important friendships of his after life seem traceable to this period, and there is really no doubt that the trend of his life underwent

a notable turn within a few years that followed the vacation of 1857.

It was soon after his return that he began to entertain the thought of acquiring a pleasant country place, for summer rest and for the entertainment of friends. On a journey from New York to Buffalo over the Erie Railway he was induced by a chance suggestion to halt for a few hours at Portage station, where that road crosses the Genesee. One look then taken from the high railway bridge into the beautiful glen of the Upper and Middle Falls of the Genesee, sealed his mind against a willing acceptance of any other spot for the country home he desired. He did not easily or quickly win possession of the coveted ground, but it was yielded to him at last, by conveyances in February, 1859, and received not much later the long familiar name of "Glen Iris," now merged in the larger appellation of Letchworth Park.

At some time in 1859, Mr. Letchworth was invited to membership in a club, called "The Nameless," which a few young men of congenial tastes had formed in Buffalo within the previous year. In most circumstances this would not have been an occurrence that called for biographical mention; but it proved to be of no small influence on the life recorded here, because of the important friendships to which it led. The club had grown out of evening gatherings in the pleasant library of the Young Men's Christian Union (as the Y. M. C. A. was first named) attracted to it by the charm of the personality of its then librarian, David Gray. Its members were among the earliest to enjoy the delightful hospitalities which their new companion was now making ready to offer to his friends. For several years, beginning in 1860, they were summoned to celebrate the Fourth of July at the Glen; and out of those congenial gatherings

came some of the earliest and most perfect of the many poems which Glen Iris, first and last, has inspired. Possibly it would be an extravagance of eulogy to say that no other spot in America has been celebrated equally to it in the fervor and the quality of the verse it has called out; yet searching criticism might uphold that suggestion, on the evidence of a collected volume of Glen Iris verse which was printed under the title of "Voices of the Glen," in 1876, and of which a new edition, with added poems, has been issued since Mr. Letchworth's death by the administrator of his estate, but under the auspices of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society. The preparation of this new edition was one of Mr. Letchworth's last tasks.

The valley of the Genesee, especially in the middle region which embraces Glen Iris, has a remarkably interesting early history, from the time of the white man's first acquaintance with it until he took it from the red man and made it his own. It was the seat of the Seneca Nation, the westernmost of the tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy; and the Senecas were active allies of the British and the Tories in the Revolutionary War. Events connected with that war, especially with Sullivan's expedition against the Senecas, in 1779, and subsequently with the buying of the Seneca lands and the removal of the tribe from the region, put the stamp of historic interest on many places in the neighborhood of Mr. Letchworth's home. He was troubled on finding that relics and mementos of the aboriginal possessors of the valley, still existing, were treated with neglect and were fast disappearing. As soon as he became free, in some degree, from immediately pressing demands on him, he made it part of his public duty to repair this neglect, to the extent that he could do so, by action of his own and by coöperation with others of like mind. In these undertakings

he had much encouragement and stimulation from some of his closer friends, especially William C. Bryant, Henry R. Howland and O. H. Marshall, who shared his interest in Indian history.

The most interesting historical relic in the Genesee Valley was the ancient Council House of the Seneca Nation, which stood about eighteen miles from Glen Iris, in the village of Caneadea. For many years after the Senecas left the Genesee Country this building, of hewn logs, which had been their parliament house,—their capitol,—supplied a habitation to the white farmer who tilled the surrounding land. It had long been out of use, however, and was falling into decay, when Mr. Letchworth, in the fall of 1871, acquired title to it and had it removed, for preservation, to his own grounds.

Having restored to its historic dignity this primitive parliament-house of an extinct nation, Mr. Letchworth was fortunately able to attach a new distinction to it and a final memory, by bringing about, on the 1st of October, 1872, a remarkable assembly of representative Senecas and Mohawks, descendants from famous chiefs and notable personages in Indian history, to light once more the council fire in the ancient hall, and sit round it in grave exchange of speech, as in the ancient days.

The removal of the ancient Seneca Council House to a prominent site in Glen Iris, was but the beginning of proceedings by Mr. Letchworth to save and to bring together, in that same place, what could be saved of the fast disappearing relics of the Senecas, in the time of their lordship on and around the Genesee. Presently, a log house or cabin that had been built by Mary Jemison (the captive "White Woman" who is a notable figure in Seneca history) while she lived on the Gardeau Tract, for one of her married

daughters, was brought over and placed near the Council House, at the entrance of an enclosure which holds both. Then, on the 7th of March, 1874, the remains of Mary Jemison were disinterred from the Indian Mission burial ground at Buffalo and deposited in a new grave, between the two buildings just named.

Mr. Letchworth became so deeply interested in the story of the strange experiences of Mary Jemison, whose parents, two brothers and a sister were slain, and herself, when a child, carried into captivity, at the outbreak of the French and Indian War, in 1755, that he published three editions of her life, as narrated from her own account of it by James E. Seaver, of Batavia, N. Y., and given to print, first, in 1824. Moreover, in the last year of his life, on the 19th of September, 1910, he accomplished a long intended tribute to her memory by erecting, near her final grave, at Glen Iris, a statue in bronze, which represents her as a young woman, in the Indian garb, carrying on her back an infant child. She had borne children to two Indian husbands, and has left numerous descendants in Western New York.

The old Seneca Council House and the Mary Jemison grave were substantially the beginnings of an extensive collection of objects connected with Indian history and archæology. With effective assistance from Mr. Henry R. Howland, Mrs. Asher Wright, and other friends, Mr. Letchworth acquired, during the next thirty or more years, a very large and scientifically valuable store of archæological relics, illustrating the primitive arts of the North American Indians, together with objects interesting as memorials of the aboriginal history of the Genesee Valley and Western New York. For the housing of most of these a practically fire-proof building, sheathed with iron and roofed with

slate, was erected in 1898, within the Council House grounds. In this they were scientifically arranged, with much care, by Mr. Howland, and the collection received the appropriate name of the Genesee Valley Museum. A "Guide" to the Museum, prepared by Mr. Howland and printed in 1907, states that it "contains about five thousand exhibits of stone implements, weapons, articles of dress, ornaments, ancient articles of copper, brass and iron, found upon the sites of old Indian villages, and other interesting specimens related to Indian life and customs, many of which have been deposited here for safe-keeping."

As one of the founders and supporters of the Buffalo Historical Society, organized in 1862, Mr. Letchworth was always identified actively and earnestly with the society's work. He was its president in 1878-79, and his address on retiring from the office was devoted in the main to a report of what had been and was being done by William C. Bryant, O. H. Marshall, himself, and others, to bring about a removal of the remains of Red Jacket, and other chiefs of the Senecas, to the Forest Lawn Cemetery of Buffalo, from the burial ground of the Cattaraugus Reservation, where the identification of them seemed likely to be lost. The councillors of the nation had assented to this removal, and it was accomplished not long afterward, under the auspices of the Historical Society. Ultimately a fine statue of Red Jacket was erected on the plot of ground which holds these remains.

Early in 1873 Mr. Letchworth withdrew from all connection with the firm of Pratt & Letchworth, having deliberately resolved to devote his remaining years to philanthropic work. He was in his prime, at fifty years of age; the business which he dropped was highly prosperous and profitable; he had accumulated no great fortune in it, but

there were safe promises of large wealth in what he gave up. To secure needed rest, or a pleasure-seeking freedom of life, many men in like circumstances may do as he did; but to quit the labors of the counting-room in mid-life, and at the crest of prosperity, renouncing their substantial rewards in order to take up an increased burden of labor, for no other reward than the satisfaction of doing good to one's fellow men, is surely a rare act.

It does not appear that any definite place or plan of labor in the field he wished to enter was in Mr. Letchworth's mind when he retired from the business that had occupied him for twenty-five years; but the place which seemed made for him was awaiting his acceptance of it, and he was called to it almost at once. In April, 1873, on the suggestion of his name by the Honorable James O. Putnam to Governor Dix, he was asked to become one of the commissioners of the New York State Board of Charities, filling a vacancy in the representation of the Eighth Judicial District (western New York), and he readily accepted the post. At about the same time he was offered the Republican nomination for Congress in the district of his country residence, where the nomination ensured election; but that proffer he declined. Neither tastes nor ambitions drew him toward public service in the political field.

The Board of State Commissioners of Public Charities —commonly referred to as the State Board of Charities— was in its seventh year of existence when Mr. Letchworth became a member. The rearing of children in county poor-houses and city almshouses was the most serious of the evil conditions that had been engaging the attention of the Board since its work began. Public interest in the matter had been undergoing a slow awakening for several years, and a gradual movement of reformation was in progress;

but it needed a push of individual energy, with a resolute will behind it, to break the impediments down. Mr. Letchworth supplied that need. He seems to have resolved at once to make this, in a special way, his first field of work, and it was so assigned to him by the Board. He began his undertakings in Erie County, with such energy and local support that the last of the children in the poor-house of that county, except infants and the imbecile or otherwise defective, were removed in February, 1874, to orphanages or family homes.

Seemingly Erie County was the first in the state to purge its poorhouse of the pauperizing and corrupting mixture of children with adults. Elsewhere the reformation movement was slow in response to the strenuous pressure upon it which the new State Commissioner of Charities was bringing to bear. Eight months after the Erie County deliverance he wrote to Secretary Hoyt, of the State Board, that he had received reports of action on the removal of children by boards of supervisors in only three other counties, namely, Jefferson, Madison, and Yates. Throughout that year he had been laboring as no other official in the state is likely to have been laboring at the time. His correspondence discloses the intensity and ardor of feeling that went into his work; his special report to the Board, at the end of the year, shows how big a task of inquiry and investigation he had performed, and what a mass of information he had gathered up. He was executing a mission that engaged his whole heart. He strove to torment all consciences with his own burning sense of the deadly wrong done to homeless children by housing and classing them with pauperized adults. He could not bear the thought of allowing a single child to be so ruined when it might be saved.

The special report submitted by Commissioner Letch-

worth at the close of the year 1874 showed the number of children remaining in the poorhouses of the state at the several dates of inquiry, in that year, to be 615, of whom 362 were boys and 253 were girls. The infants under two years of age numbered 143. Of the remainder, 348 were between two and ten years of age; 124 were from ten to fifteen in years. The fathers of 329 and the mothers of 115 were known to be intemperate; 32 were known to be descendants of pauper grandfathers; 47 of pauper grandmothers; 105 of pauper fathers; 441 of pauper mothers; 249 had brothers and 223 had sisters who were or had been paupers; 204 were of illegitimate birth; 190 were born in the poorhouse. Thoughtfully discussing the exhibit of dreadful facts, Mr. Letchworth laid an impressive stress on the deadliness of the effect on character in childhood which must be produced by such pauperizing examples and influences as a poorhouse surrounds them with.

Thus far in the undertaking to bring about a removal of dependent children from association with adult paupers there had been nothing but persuasion and some pressure of public opinion to bring to bear on the local authorities concerned. Now Commissioner Letchworth invoked the aid of mandatory law, and secured, on the recommendation of his Board, the passage of an Act which declared that after January 1, 1876, no child over three and under sixteen years of age, of proper intelligence and suited for family care should be committed or sent to any county poorhouse of the state, and that all children of this class then in the county poorhouses should, within the time named, be removed from such poorhouses and provided for in families, asylums, or other appropriate institutions.

With this backing of positive law and the hearty coöperation of his colleagues in the State Board of Charities, Com-

missioner Letchworth, in his special mission of child-saving from pauperism, had only to contend thereafter with difficulties in some counties that arose from a present deficiency of institutions to which the pauper children could be removed. He had satisfied himself that, generally throughout the state, the required transfers could be made without overtaxing the capacity of existing asylums, etc., provided that proper exertions were made systematically at the asylums to place their children in families—which ought to be the constant aim. This now gave him a new special duty —to inspire earnestness and energy in the work of securing good family homes for the homeless children of the state, to the end that no public asylum for such children, of good promise in body and mind, should be conducted otherwise than as an agency for their early introduction to family life in reputable private homes.

The remarkable effectiveness of Mr. Letchworth's work as a commissioner of the State Board of Charities was now recognized by all who gave attention to the governmental dealing with want and misdoing. They saw that a new force had come into that field of official service, and they welcomed it with acclaim. For example, the very eminent sociologist, Dr. Elisha Harris, then Corresponding Secretary of the Prison Association of New York, afterward Secretary of the State Board of Health, wrote to Mr. Letchworth in March, 1875: "Your study of the rights of children and of our duty to them and the state is worth a lifetime of toil. You have thrown such a true light on the almshouse children that the doors of good homes and the hearts of thoughtful citizens and good women will open and bless them." Six months later we find Dr. Harris writing again: "It is by such persistent efforts as yours for the friendless children that causes of crime and vice are to

be repressed. It is not in the power of language to convey my thanks for your service in this matter."

Political influences in New York City offered determined resistance to the law requiring children to be removed from almshouses, and strove with might and main to obtain from the legislature an act exempting the institutions on Randall's Island from its operation; but Mr. Letchworth had conducted investigations there which showed that the conditions in those institutions were the worst in the state. Armed with damning facts he gave battle to the politicians of the metropolis, and succeeded, as he succeeded almost always, in defeating opposition from ignorant sources or sinister motives to measures and undertakings which he believed, on well-studied grounds, to be for the public good.

This was the second demonstration that Commissioner Letchworth, in his official service, had given of the very potent and peculiar executive force he possessed. One of the mildest, most gently mannered of men,—Quaker-bred, and realizing in his whole character the ideals of that culture of the quiet spirit,—he was capable, nevertheless, at need, of an iron determination in what he undertook to do, and a persistence which never tired, never yielded to discouragement, and rarely suffered defeat. His first exhibit of those qualities was called out soon after he took his seat in the State Board of Charities. The Board was then becoming an object of attacks, inspired evidently by the manipulators of party politics, who had discovered that it might be made a useful instrument in their hands. The enlarged powers conferred on it in 1873 appear to have equipped it to their liking, as a piece of machinery for political work, and they lost no time in starting measures for bringing it under their control. An account of what

occurred was written subsequently by Mr. Letchworth, as follows:

"As I was coming down Main street, in Buffalo, one morning in the early part of 1874, I met Mr. Joseph Warren, editor of the Buffalo *Courier,* who had just left the train after a night's ride from Albany. He informed me that action had been taken in the Senate the day before to abolish the State Board of Charities. I asked him upon what grounds. He could not tell me, but supposed it was in consequence of some irregularities. I told him that this was not possible, in view of the personnel of the Board and lack of opportunity on the part of the commissioners for deriving any personal advantage from their office. He had given little attention to the matter, but, as he then recalled what he had heard, there was some whispered scandal connected with the movement.

"I went immediately to Albany and, seeking the president of the Board [Mr. John V. L. Pruyn], asked him the meaning of the attack. He could only divine that it was a political movement to bring the Board eventually under partisan control, as were the state prisons, over which there was but one superintendent. The movement had such backing that Mr. Pruyn thought nothing could be done. He had heard from several members of the Board, who expressed themselves as excessively chagrined and mortified, and declared their intention to resign. I told the president that I had not sought this office; that I had endeavored to discharge my duties faithfully during the short time I had held it; that I regarded this action as a reflection on my integrity, and that I should not rest quietly under it, but should demand an official investigation. He sympathized with the members of the Board in their chagrin, but did not feel like entering into an angry controversy over the action taken. He said, however, that he would sanction every effort I might make to protect the Board. With this assurance from the president I entered upon the campaign.

"Senator Ganson, of Buffalo, a man of high character and a leader of one of the political parties, and Senator King, leader of the opposite political party and chairman of the Senate finance committee,—a man of benevolent impulses,—espoused the cause of the Board on the floor of the

Senate and were supported by others. The Board was finally vindicated and the charges were withdrawn, leaving it stronger than when the attack was made.

"This issue having been set aside, I asked the chairman of the finance committee to insert in the appropriation bill an item of $3000 for the use of the Board in making an inquiry into the causes of pauperism and crime,—something it had been authorized to do by the previous legislature, but for which no appropriation had been made, and nothing had been done. The chairman of the committee, who was a friend of the Board, advised me not to ask for this grant, in view of the recent attack on the Board, and, though consenting to do this if I insisted, wished me to understand that he would not be responsible for the consequences. The appropriation was inserted, however, at my request, in the supply bill, and was approved by the committee."

Thus the Quaker member of the Board, no more than fairly seated in it, was the one to spring to its defence and find cudgels for beating off the attack. Not only that, but the encounter roused him to push forward and snatch a positive trophy of victory from the discomfited assailants of the Board, in the form of an increased appropriation for its work. It was a striking revelation that he gave then of the reinforcement of energy, courage, earnestness, and sound practical judgment which his appointment had brought into the important body that supervises the public charities of the state. Without self-assertion or assumption on his part, there was a natural and necessary leadership in what he did, which had recognition very soon in his election (June, 1874) to the vice-presidency of the Board, and to the presidency in 1877.

Substantially, so far as concerned his own state, the child-saving labors of Mr. Letchworth in this particular field were finished by the year 1876. The finest tribute paid to the great importance and effectiveness of the social service rendered in those labors came many years afterwards

from an intelligent head of the finance department of the City of New York, where they had been most obstinately and violently opposed. Comptroller Edward M. Grout, in an official report on "Private Charitable Institutions in the City of New York," made in 1904, referred to this part of Mr. Letchworth's work as follows:

"In the early seventies charity workers, impressed with the iniquity of the almshouse system, determined to effect a change. A crusade against almshouses—for it may properly be called that—found its leader in the Honorable William P. Letchworth, of Portage, New York, one of the indefatigable workers in the State Board of Charities. It is fair to call him the father of the movement to take children out of the degrading conventions in poorhouses and almshouses."

After extended quotations from Mr. Letchworth's reports the comptroller goes on to say:

"The result of Mr. Letchworth's work was tremendous and overwhelming. The legislature asked,—'What can be done with these children, and where can they be placed?' Fresh from his examination of every institution in the State, Mr. Letchworth replied that the private institutions were the natural and logical way out. . . . There appeared to be no other satisfactory solution to the problem. The city determined, definitely, either to turn all its dependent children over to the charitable institutions or return them to their parents and guardians. . . . The last of the children were transferred from Randall's Island December 31, 1875; and in the report of the Commissioners for that year, presented to the mayor early in 1876, the whole matter was summed up in these words: "The Nursery on Randall's Island, by act of the legislature, was abolished with the close of the year, and it is prohibited by law to receive children over three years of age."

This emphatic official testimony from the metropolitan city affords conclusive evidence that the fight to rescue children from pauper-keeping establishments in the State of

New York was fought and won by Commissioner Letchworth, as the general commanding the reformatory forces in the state; and that it was won practically within the first three years of his service in the field.

But, while this finished his exertions on that particular child-saving line in New York, it carried him on the same line into other fields of struggle, to the same end. He was called to become a missionary in other states of the appeal against child-pauperism, and performed heavy labors in that mission for a number of years.

At the same time Commissioner Letchworth was now turning his special attention to that other important field of child-saving work, wherein the subjects are children already approaching or beginning vicious or criminal lives,—the wayward, the errant, the delinquent of many classes and many degrees, for whom there is hope of rescue and reform if wise and timely treatment is applied. With the appeal to his sympathy and interest from these unfortunates came another, which moved him simultaneously to ardent efforts for bringing more intelligence and humanity into the care of the insane. In these matters he found more of problem than in the subjects of his previous work, and he sought light from all that experience, practice or theory, abroad as well as at home, could afford. Hence, from July, 1880, until the following January, he was in Europe, not for rest or for pleasure, but on a mission of inquiry and observation, the most strenuous that his enlistment in social service had yet moved him to undertake. His special purpose was to see how other countries dealt with delinquent children and how they treated their insane, and thus to learn what they might have to teach with helpfulness to the solving of the two problems in public benevolence which now claimed the most of his thought.

From his observations abroad it is certain that Mr. Letchworth brought much that cleared his understanding, instructed his judgment, broadened and deepened his thought concerning the grave and difficult matter of so dealing with errant youth as to train it into better courses; but the cardinal convictions of his mind on this subject were those which the Rauhe Haus of Immanuel Wichern, at Hamburg, Germany, and its varied copies elsewhere, had impressed upon him. For a time it became his chief mission to plead for the transformation of juvenile "houses of refuge" and similar so-called reformatories from grim prisons into systematized industrial schools; for the tearing away of their stone walls; for the transplanting of them into open country surroundings; for the grouping and cottage-housing of their pupil inmates, under some semblance of the associations of a common family life; and (before all else) for a careful classification of juvenile delinquents, to part the uncorrupted from the corrupt. In this mission he was urging no propositions from his own mind. It was never his way to rest a recommendation that he offered to the public on a merely theoretical idea. All the problems in public philanthropy that he dealt with were studied in the light of such experiments and experiences as applied a sure test to the theory from which they sprang.

His investigations to that end were the most remarkable part of his work. No time, no labor, no travel, no sacrifice of his personal comfort was too much for him to give to the searching out and inspecting of institutions and of laws which had object lessons of method to offer, with conclusive provings of result. He was unmatched among social workers in that effectual study, and therefore unmatched as a public teacher on the vital subjects which he prepared himself to speak upon with high authority. The authority of

his opinion on these matters was recognized, because the carefulness of the quest which went before the opinion was always plain. Hence, it can safely be said that the influence of Mr. Letchworth, beyond any other personal influence in the last generation, has entered into the producing of a wholly different public opinion at the present day, touching the public treatment of dependent and delinquent children, compared with that of the time when he began his work as a commissioner in the Board of Charities of the State of New York.

Similarly, in relation to the care and treatment of the insane, the important effect of his well-directed great labor came from its collection and dissemination of knowledge, as to the best that had been done anywhere in the performance of that humane duty; the successes of experiment, and the failures; the proved possibilities of unrestraint, of social freedom and enjoyment, of soothing and curative influences brought to bear on disordered minds, and the institutional construction and organization that had been found to contribute most to the realizing of those possibilities. Principally and most effectively this was done by Mr. Letchworth in his elaborate and important report of the studies he had made in Europe, beautifully published in 1889, in a royal octavo volume of 374 pages, under the title of "The Insane in Foreign Countries." The admirable quality of this treatise, the supreme importance of the matters with which it dealt and the high value of the enlightenment it threw upon them, were recognized at once by those qualified for the recognition. Leading alienists at home and abroad gave it a specially cordial reception.

More immediate and notable effects of reform in the care and treatment of the insane were produced by the personal exertions of Mr Letchworth, before his book on the

subject appeared. At once, on his return from Europe, he obtained from the State Board of Charities the appointment of himself and another Commissioner as a committee to visit and report on the condition of the insane department of poorhouses in counties exempted, under the Act of 1871, from a previous statute requiring all chronic insane to be transferred to the Willard Asylum, at Ovid. The report of this committee, when published, started an agitation which grew and gathered force until it had compelled the State, by the "State Care Act" of 1890, to take on itself, wholly and exclusively, the care of the insane within its borders, and to equip itself adequately with institutions to that end.

In 1888 Mr. Letchworth resigned the presidency of the State Board of Charities, in which he had been kept by repeated elections for eleven years. In January, 1893, he received his fourth consecutive appointment to membership in the Board. A little later, that year, on the 9th of February, a mark of distinction so high that few have ever received it came to him from the University of the State of New York, by vote of the Regents of the University, conferring on him the degree of LL. D., "in recognition of his distinguished services to the State of New York, as a member and president of the State Board of Charities and as an author of most valuable literature pertaining to the dependent classes." In the one hundred and ten years of its existence at that date the Board of Regents had conferred this honorary degree only twenty times.

On the 14th of November, 1896, by resignation to the Governor, the long service of Mr. Letchworth to the State of New York as a Commissioner of Charities was brought to an end. His enlistment in the service of suffering humanity was not ended, however, until his death.

After Mr. Letchworth's withdrawal from the service of the state there were years of work in his life, performed in the same field. He had surrendered official authority, but needed none to maintain the power of influence with which he could still labor for the unfortunates of mankind who need public care. He was released from tasks of supervision and inspection which had occupied great parts of his time, and could devote himself more to studies and discussions of the large problems of public philanthropy. The most important of these were now directed to the benefit of the victims of epilepsy,—a large class of pitiful sufferers who had experienced, in our country especially, more and longer neglect than any other whose affliction appealed as painfully to the sympathies of their fellow men. He had become deeply interested in these unfortunates some years before, and had taken a leading part in the movement, initiated by the writings of Dr. Frederick Peterson of New York, which had already produced the notable Craig Colony for Epileptics at Sonyea, near Mount Morris, in the Genesee Valley. A documentary history of the whole course of proceedings connected with the founding of this first colony for epileptics in the State of New York was compiled by Mr. Letchworth in his last years. The record shows him quite distinctly to have been the persistent spirit in the movement, throughout; pricking it to action when it lagged, and rousing it to fresh aggressiveness when it had been stricken with discouragement by a Governor's veto in 1892.

His sense of duty to the victims of epilepsy was far from satisfied by this achievement. Pursuing inquiries in all parts of the country, he found practically nothing done for epileptics in a large majority of the states, or nothing that was fitting to their case. He recognized, therefore, an

extremely urgent need of information to the public of the nation, as to the dreadful extent of this neglect, and what it meant of suffering to thousands of individuals and of grave consequences to society at large. The situation was one of which few people, even in the medical profession, appear to have had clear knowledge. The facts of it had never been gathered up and put forth collectively, in a form to be impressive in effect. He determined now to take on himself the task of assembling this needed information from its many sources, printed and unprinted, and making it available for use in stirring public feeling on the subject. He had done something in that direction already, in two papers prepared for the National Conference of Charities and Correction. He now undertook a work of thoroughness on the lines that were sketched in those essays. The book, entitled "Care and Treatment of Epileptics," was published in the same admirable style as that of "The Insane in Foreign Countries," with appropriate and interesting illustrations, by the Messrs. G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York and London, early in 1900. Reviews of it in the medical journals at home and abroad were universally commendatory. Two years prior to the publication of the book, a "National Association for the Study of Epilepsy and the Care and Treatment of Epileptics" had been organized, with Mr. Letchworth as its first President, and the first volume of its "Transactions" was edited by him and published at his expense.

When, in 1909, the State of New York framed final legislation for the establishing, near the Hudson, of a second Colony for Epileptics, on a scale even larger than that of Craig Colony, its legislature enacted that this great institution should bear "the name and title of 'Letchworth Village,' in honor of William Pryor Letchworth of Portage, New

York, whose efficient public services in behalf of the feeble-minded, epileptic, and other dependent unfortunates the state desires to commemorate."

Early in 1898 a project of sordid menace to Glen Iris came to light, and the peace of the Glen's good master and devoted lover was tormented by it thenceforward until his death. Avaricious capital had planned to exploit the falls of the Genesee for electric power, and the Legislature, in the spring of 1898, had before it a bill which granted the needed authority. Details of the long defensive struggle which has thus far saved the choicest beauty-spot of the state from destruction cannot be given here. It was made decisive in the first month of 1907, by a gift to the State of New York of the entire Glen Iris estate, covering about one thousand acres of land, on both sides of the Genesee, and embracing the Lower as well as the Middle and Upper Falls of the river. Before deciding to make the tender of this splendid domain to the State, Mr. Letchworth had studied how best to secure for it a faithful caretaking in future years. In doing this he became attentive to the mission and work of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, founded by Andrew H. Green, the father of New York City's Central Park, and incorporated in 1895. The result, after conferences with the trustees of the Society, was a proposal of the gift to the state, for the purposes of a public park or reservation, subject to the proviso that Mr. Letchworth should retain a life use and tenancy, with the right further to improve the property, and that upon his death the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society should have the management and control. The proposal, recommended strongly by Governor Hughes, was accepted by Act of the Legislature, following which, by concurrent resolution of the Senate, February 4,

1907, and of the Assembly, February 5, it was declared that the lands conveyed to the state by Mr. Letchworth should hereafter be known as "Letchworth Park," "to commemorate the humane and noble work in private and public charities to which his life has been devoted, and in recognition of his eminent services to the people of this state."

Almost, if not quite, from the beginning of Mr. Letchworth's ownership of Glen Iris it had been his intention that it should go to a public use when he died. As early as 1870 he had procured legislation which "constituted and appointed a body corporate for the purpose of establishing and maintaining in the County of Wyoming an institution for the support and education of indigent young persons," and named it the Wyoming Benevolent Institute. This, without doubt, was an instrument of organization made ready, with wise precaution, in advance, for employment in due time. Its legal vitality was preserved with care; certain land and buildings were conveyed to it; it entertained orphaned children from Buffalo and Rochester in summer outings at times; and, though nothing that attempted the fulfilment of its declared purpose ever came from it, the purpose itself, "of establishing and maintaining in the County of Wyoming an institution for the support and education of indigent young persons," does not appear to have undergone any change. It seems, therefore, to be manifest that when Mr. Letchworth, to save Glen Iris from becoming the seat of an electric power plant, gave it into the keeping of the state, for the purposes of a public park or reservation, he simply changed its destination from one long-intended public use to another.

The life-tenancy which his deed of gift reserved to him had a longer term for Mr. Letchworth than might have

been expected; for he had been a maimed and weakened man since the 14th of February, 1903, when he was smitten with a partial paralysis of body, which had little effect on his mind. Gradually regaining some measure of strength and a feeble use of his limbs, he became busied again, not with any new undertakings in the former lines of his public work, but in some endeavors to enlarge the fruitfulness of what he had done, as well as in renewed attention to his private affairs, and in attempts to reduce his enormous accumulation of letters and papers to an orderly state. This and the planning and executing at his own expense of continued works of landscape improvement on the Glen Iris grounds, even after they had become the grounds of a public park, occupied him until the actually last day of his life. That day was the 1st of December, 1910. When its evening came he partook of his usual light supper, and said, presently, that he would take a rest. His nurse assisted him to his bed in an adjoining room, and had left him but a few moments when she heard some sound which caused her to return. She found that in those moments his life had come to its end. He had left it as quietly as if passing into sleep. Five days later his body had burial in the Forest Lawn Cemetery at Buffalo.

In appearance and demeanor Mr. Letchworth realized always the ideal of a true representative of the Society of Friends, moulded outwardly by the inward moulding of Christian teaching as construed by George Fox. And this could raise no expectation of the resolution, the will, the energy which went with his benevolent quietude of spirit into all that he undertook to do.

Nothing that he undertook had been taken hastily in hand. He set his foot in no path until he knew fully the ground to be traversed in it, as well as the end to which it

led, and saw clearly the right and the need or the good reason for going forward therein. Pending these determinations of his mind he showed often much hesitancy and seeming indecisiveness of will; but when the light he sought had been obtained, and the practicable way to a desirable and right object of endeavor could be seen distinctly, he became, in his quiet way, one of the most inflexibly determined of men,—undiscouraged by obstacles, undaunted by opposition.

Only those who came into both working and social intimacy with Mr. Letchworth could learn how distinctly his nature united two temperaments which are seldom balanced so evenly in the same individual. To know him in the relations that exhibited but one of these was to think of him, most probably, as a sentimentalist,—a man of too much emotionality for successful dealing with the hardness and aggressiveness of the ruder conditions of life. This, it could easily be thought, would not only explain his philanthropy, but throw doubt on the judgment and efficiency with which its promptings would be directed. And he did have an emotional susceptibility and a delicacy of mind which in most makings of character would warrant that conclusion. His enjoyments were of the sweeter and gentler sort. The lovelier sides of nature, the finer things of art, the generous exhibitions of humanity, appealed to him most. He was exceptionally fond of poetry, and with a catholic taste; delighted in reading it and having it read to him, and carried in memory a large store of it, which he had begun to accumulate in his youth.

To know him in this character, and to have acquaintance, at the same time, with the strenuous business man that he was for thirty years and the strong state official that he was for twenty-three more,—vigilant, decisive, resolute, prac-

tically sagacious, successful beyond the common, in both exhibitions,—was to have a revelation of character that is exceedingly rare in its combination of qualities, and exceedingly fine.

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